

## A Different Approach

by countessem

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Summary: After yet another battle with the Shinsengumi, Amagiri decides to take it upon himself to steer Kazama down the right path to winning over his new love, Chizuru.

### 1. Chapter 1

A/N: Hello all! This is the first time I've written in years! This is not intended to be serious in any way at all. Please don't assume it is. I played this game as a result of being forced into it by my editor, and a week later here I am. This is a back/side story for the demons, and is thus not completely canon in the anime/manga/game/whatever. Regardless of this, enjoy!

Amagiri sighed. This was the third time in the past month he had been forced to follow Kazama on his pointless venture to win Chizuru Yukimura over. He was well aware of the situation, as it had been explained to him years ago when he was first charged with caring for young Kazama. Amagiri's father had passed this story down to him before he departed for the Continent.

Amagiri's father had informed him that he would be looking after the young child who would soon grow up to become head of the family. Normally a demon lord would not receive a bodyguard until they were much older, but following the demise of the Yukimura clan, a decree was passed that the younger demons must be protected to preserve their kind. His name was Chikage Kazama, and upon their first meeting, he had declared Amagiri a poor bodyguard without a sword to defend them with. When Amagiri proceeded to try and explain the family's long line of skilled hand combat, Kazama informed him that it was a poor fighting style, and walked out of the room without being dismissed. From that day on, Amagiri was forced to follow Kazama and keep him out of trouble. Most of his job was simple, such as making sure he didn't insult too many high ranking officials and keeping him from picking fights he could not win. Recently however, his workload had doubled, if not tripled.

Kazama had taken to a young girl by the name of Chizuru. While usually deterring women from him was easy given his own absentmindedness, this one had proven more difficult than any of his previous quests by far. Chizuru turned out to be the head of the Yukimura clan, the last of her kind, and Kazama had declared to her that she would be his, and vowed to do whatever it took to make her his wife. To add insult to injury, she was living with the Shinsengumi who were allied with the opposing side on what was slowly becoming a war.

Amagiri understood that finding a wife for Kazama would be a rough journey, especially given the rarity of female demons at the present time. Ever since one of the major demon clans had been wiped out, it had proven difficult to bounce back from the loss. Normally it was challenging to find a mate, but not impossible, unless your name was Chikage Kazama. Despite being schooled in the ways of becoming a proper demon lord, he remained woefully inept at finding a mate for himself. Many women came for him, but few ever succeeded in gaining his attention. This was customary, for only a woman of high social standing among demons would be considered acceptable for Lord Kazama. When the last of the Yukimura line was found living among human soldiers, Kazama ran blindly into the fight, being the single-minded fool he was. He refused to accept that Chizuru had her own reasons for remaining with the Shinsengumi. They had promised to help her find her father, and had become her friends in the process. Despite knowing these things, Kazama continued to try and coerce her over to their side. Amagiri, exasperated as he was at these endeavors, continued to follow his lord as he had promised years ago.

The only true obstacle that remained after the Shinsengumi was Sen-Hime; she was determined to get in their way. While she did attempt to free Chizuru from the Shinsengumi, she was also hell-bent on keeping Kazama away from her. Given Kazama's reputation for mindless pursuits, this was not unexpected. This had made their quest even more difficult, which led to the situation they were in now. They were recovering from yet another retreat out of the Shinsengumi headquarters, and Kazama as usual was complaining about another loss of his bride.

"I can't believe we lost her again! Amagiri you're supposed to help me, which means getting rid of those stupid humans," Kazama barked.

Amagiri merely sighed and worked quickly to form a response to cool Kazama's short temper.

"Lord Kazama, we cannot continue getting ourselves involved in human affairs. Perhaps you should consider a more gentle approach with Yukimura? One that does not involve fighting with those she still considers friends?"

This seemed to calm Kazama's temper, but only increased his annoyance at the situation. It was all too clear that his constant snubbing of women had left him unable to court them. There had to be a way to coach him through the proper technique of winning over a woman. Amagiri pondered this while their other companion Shiranui chimed in.

"You know you could stop trying to court her and kidnap her at the

same time too," he said with a laugh. "Maybe that's why you suck at this, you're trying too damn hard."

Amagiri was at wits end. Dealing with both Kazama and Shiranui had begun to wear on his nerves. Thankfully, Shiranui had struck up a rivalry with one of the Shinsengumi and became more and more distracted with that. He made up his mind, and was going to attempt to school his lord in the ways of properly winning over a woman. He had done it himself after all.

"Lord Kazama, perhaps we should consider a different approach. I no longer wish to be involved in human affairs, and it would be best if you removed yourself from them as well."

Kazama's scowl deepened as Amagiri went on. He was noticeably unhappy with what Amagiri was suggesting.

"Then how am I supposed to go about it Amagiri," he began to yell.

It remained clear he was becoming more and more annoyed. Amagiri quickly stepped in to smooth over the situation.

"I am suggesting you possibly take a more subtle route for now. She will be more willing to speak with you if you show that you are capable of things other than brute violence. Leave her a gift perhaps."

Shiranui immediately started laughing. It was obvious what he thought of Amagiri's suggestion. Eventually his laughter subsided, and he managed to form a response through the occasional snickering.

"You've got to be kidding," he snarled. "Demons don't 'play nice' Amagiri, we take what we want and what we want should cooperate long enough to be taken."

Unfazed, Amagiri simply replied, "Be that as it may, let us at least consider the possibility once. If the plan fails, then we can continue along the path we have been following."

Kazama thought over both sides, and it was apparent his mind was working hard to reach a decision. Eventually, he made up his mind.

"Alright Amagiri, we shall attempt your plan this once. What kind of gift do you have in mind?"

His response came out more as an order than a question. Amagiri ignored the glares from their other companion and continued on.

"Yukimura often passes by a flower shop on her rounds with the Shinsengumi. While never expressing this desire, she often seems to wish to purchase from the shop. Perhaps that is an acceptable starting point, Lord Kazama."

"And what would I do with said flowers Amagiri," he quickly retorted, his anger showing once more. "If we are to avoid more fights that is."

Quick with a solution, Amagiri continued, "Leave them by her door when they are not on guard. This should be a simple task for a demon such as you. Knock to alert her and leave as quickly as you came."

This solution seemed to be enough for him, as he quickly stood up and prepared to leave. Shiranui decided he wanted none of this adventure, and went to go preoccupy himself with something more to his tastes. Amagiri swiftly followed Kazama on the path to the shop, and silently pled for this plan to be successful.

## 2. Chapter 2

A/N: Thank you all for your reviews/fav/follows! I'm glad to know this venture back into fanfiction is a successful one! Enjoy this new (and slightly longer) chapter.

Shiranui continued along his path toward the Shinsengumi's headquarters. Amagiri was a fool for indulging Kazama in this courting nonsense, and to think that they had actually gone through with it sickened him. He stuck by his own argument from the other night; they were demons, they took what they wanted. This courting business was a waste of time. Shiranui had spent his own time wisely, and prepared for another round of fighting with Harada. The men of the Shinsengumi were admirable foes; for humans at least. Their passion and drive reminded him of someone he knew years ago, and despite the risk of angering Amagiri, it was too much fun to lure them into a fight, especially the lone spearman. Shiranui's reminiscing had made him lose track of time, and when he snapped out of it, he was outside of the walls of his destination.

There was a lone sentry on guard at the main entrance, but it was apparent he was at the end of his shift. The sentry was nodding off, and that moment of carelessness was just the opening Shiranui needed to slip inside. It had been almost too easy to get in, but given how easy it usually was for all three of them to waltz in undetected, it wasn't horribly shocking one had gotten in with no trouble at all. Once inside, he padded quietly through the vacant halls. He vaguely remembered the layout from their previous attack, and made his way toward the common room in hopes of locating a worthy opponent. Inside, he was disappointed to find that not only was Harada not there, neither was anyone else worthy of his attention. The only one remaining was one of his friends who had fought Amagiri at Ikeda Inn. This kid fought Amagiri? He certainly didn't look like anything worth fighting. Upon seeing the demon, he immediately sprang into a fighting stance, katana at the ready. His size was a shock to Shiranui. While he was used to seeing young demons on the battlefield, he had yet to meet a human the same size this well trained. He raised an eyebrow as the kid began to yell, not even bothering to waste the effort of drawing his gun.

"What are you doing here? I thought we made it clear what would happen if you came back after the other day," he growled.

Shiranui bit back a laugh; did this kid truly think he could intimidate a demon? Well, it took guts, he was willing to give him that. Shiranui lazily searched his memory for the kid's name. He recalled that Amagiri said his name was Heisuke Toudou. From what he

remembered of Amagiri's recount of the fight, this kid had a bark far worse than his bite.

"I'm looking for a real opponent, kid. Where is everyone else?"

Shiranui watched the kid get angrier at his insult, though he made little move to do anything about it. He remained in a fighting stance as he answered. His reply came out more of a snarl than anything else. This was clearly a hot topic with the boy.

"Everyone went out on a raid. I thought you would have known that already," Heisuke snapped.

Shiranui scowled, clearly unhappy with that answer. He was itching for a fight, and it was clear he wasn't going to get one at the present time. It was then that he realized that Heisuke was giving away crucial information on the Shinsengumi. This kid was too young to realize the value of keeping secrets, so it should be fairly easy to get more out of him. Shiranui decided to give one more push to get the kid to spill more without trying to take his head off. He liked his head where it was.

"I have better things to do than keep watch on you lot during my free time, let alone care who you attack in the middle of the night. Look kid, I'm not in the mood to fight anymore, so put the toy away."

Shiranui wanted to get past the small talk and onto good information. Playing nice was clearly going to get him farther than combat was. The kid growled at him, but nonetheless put his katana back in its scabbard when he realized the demon really wasn't going to pick a fight. Shiranui noticed, however, his hand never left the hilt. Kazama's misadventure the other night was at the front of his mind, and it seemed like the kid read his thoughts as he pressed on with more questions.

"You came here just to fight? Where are your companions anyway? I wouldn't think you'd come alone after we chased you off last time."

Shiranui scoffed. They had better things to do than fight humans all night. He hated being lumped in with those two sometimes, and now was definitely one of those times. He grumbled and begrudgingly answered.

"I couldn't care less what those two pansies are doing right now. They're too wrapped up in their own nonsense to care about the Shinsengumi."

This seemed to be an acceptable answer as the kid contemplated something. Eventually he spoke up again.

"Well, I suppose with the increase in security it'd be pretty stupid if all three of you tried another attack right after your last."

Shiranui perked up, finally interested in what he had to say. He had to hand it to Amagiri, sometimes just listening was the key to good information. Just because the Shinsengumi were prone to rambling,

however, didn't make it effective against other foes. Shiranui had no plans to make it a habit because of this; it just wasn't his kid stayed quiet, waiting for a response. He clearly needed some more prodding, so Shiranui decided to turn up the heat a little.

"Pretty poor increase I have to say. I got in with no problems."

The kid grumbled, gripping his sword tighter, eyes flashing in anger.

"We didn't increase it because of you, though all the repairs we've had to do are a pain in the ass. We did it because someone broke in the other night."

Shiranui had a feeling that this had something to do with his fearless leader. Kazama had never truly grown out of his childhood arrogance, which explained why he got stuck with a babysitter earlier in life than usual. Young demons grew out of their impulsive desires, but as far as Shiranui could tell, it was less of a phase and more of a character flaw. He hadn't bothered to see if those fools had actually gone through with their plan, but upon hearing this news, he had a strong suspicion they had. Not one to pass up being able to gloat and gather blackmail, Shiranui pressed on.

"Any indication of why? Seems stupid to sneak in here and do nothing."

Shiranui was vaguely aware that was exactly what he was doing, but let the irony slide. He had better reasons to come than flirting with some girl. Heisuke snorted at this.

"Yea well the creep just left flowers outside Chizuru's room, no note no nothing, just dropped them and left. We had a debate about it last night."

Heisuke seemed hesitant to continue. This was perfect; he clearly had secrets to tell about the rest of his captains. Now just to nudge it out of him.

"Debate," Shiranui chuckled, "From what I've seen you guys yell a lot more than anything else. How'd you know someone outside did it?"

He saw Heisuke sigh and considered this a small victory. He had clearly hit the nail on the head about their 'debate'. He watched the boy ponder whether or not to continue. Just as Shiranui was about to lose his patience, he answered.

"Well, we had a huge fight about it right after it happened. Nagakura and Harada teased the hell out of me, thinking I did it. They thought I was too scared to admit to leaving flowers and just ran away. When I told them to back off, everyone looked at Hijikata for an explanation, and he didn't have one," he sighed, obviously still annoyed about the whole thing. "Okita backed him up though, and said if Hijikata had done it, he would have left some awful poetry along with it. He also said we would have known if Nagakura had done it; he would have announced it to the whole damn camp. After we got done mocking each other, it was pretty obvious none of the captains did it."

Shiranui couldn't contain it any longer. He burst out laughing,

having to brace himself against the door before he fell over in a fit. Not only was Kazama stupid enough to go through with this courting nonsense, he forgot to leave any indication he did it! Not even Amagiri could save that fool from himself it seemed. Heisuke just looked on confused until he regained his composure.

"Oh this is even better than finding Harada," he exclaimed. "I can't believe he really went through with it!"

Still completely confused, Heisuke tried to get answers in between Shiranui's occasional snickering. His yelling went largely unheard over the laughter, but being the youngest of the captains he was used to it and continued anyway.

"What the hell do you mean 'went through with it'? Is this some stupid plot you three cooked up? You better have a good explanation for this!"

Noticing how defensive Heisuke was getting, Shiranui tried to stifle his laughter. He remained mostly unsuccessful until the boy moved to take out his katana again. After a few more laughs, he managed to regain composure enough to explain what was going on.

"Yea I know what happened. That was Amagiri's stupid idea. Too bad he forgot to tell Kazama to leave a goddamned note or something."

It was apparent the boy caught the hint of contempt in his voice, but said nothing. Shiranui supposed he was smart enough not to pick a fight he couldn't win alone. The kid seemed too lost in his thoughts to attack anyway.

"So that was your ringleader then? He really is stupid," Heisuke blurted out without thinking.

Shiranui watched as he quickly clapped his hands over his mouth. He probably thought insulting Kazama would offend Shiranui, but he couldn't care less. The only person he swore loyalty to was himself. Shiranui smirked to himself. This kid was catching on quick to their 'ringleader\*\*' \*\*and his endless nonsense.

"You're telling me. Amagiri convinced him 'subtle' was a better way to win her over."

With the few interactions they'd had with Kazama, all of the captains surely had to have come to realize that Kazama was not was then that Shiranui had an amusing thought, one he rather liked. Perhaps this kid could rat Kazama out to Chizuru, considering how easily he had tattled on his own friends. After all, this was a ridiculous plan Amagiri had come up with. Shiranui had now made it his mission to see that plan fall apart thanks to Kazama's foolishness. It might even lead to another good battle with Harada. If he could get this kid to blab, all Shiranui had to do was watch as the whole plan collapsed on itself. With a few more nudges, he was convinced Heisuke would run to tell her the news.

"Man, he is a moron. Why the hell didn't he leave a note or something?"

They both thought this over, and laughed. They agreed on one thing at least, Kazama was a moron. Said moron had to be told to leave a note,

something Amagiri had clearly forgotten.

"I don't know what to tell you. Amagiri's getting absentminded in his old age. After watching over Kazama this long, you'd think he'd remember to spell everything out. Guess not. Well the secret's out now, not much to be done about it."

Shiranui watched the wheels in Heisuke's head turn. He guessed this was a bit of insight into how their trio functioned. He vaguely remembered this kid often hung around with Harada and the other large buffoon in their own dysfunctional trio. He sighed inwardly, waiting as some more cogs clicked into place before the kid announced his plans.

"Oh that is rich. I gotta tell Chizuru now!"

Shiranui grinned. This was exactly what he wanted, and the kid had walked right into it!

"Go ahead, it'll piss Amagiri off to know just how badly his plan went."

This seemed to be the right thing to say. Clearly Amagiri had pushed enough buttons to ruffle him up a bit. Heisuke would certainly tell this girl, and probably add a few insults about Kazama and Amagiri while he was at it. He might get jabbed at too, but it was for the greater good ultimately. It was then that Shiranui looked up at the sky, which was easily viewed from the open room, and realized how late it had gotten. He needed to get back before his companions returned. While it usually wasn't an issue that he ran off on his own, they'd both be angry if they knew he had gone to find the Shinsengumi without them. On Shiranui's way out, he couldn't resist one last jab at the kid.

"Look I gotta go back to the aforementioned moron. Next time, maybe try to bulk a little before picking a fight with us."

Shiranui grinned and laughed as he slipped out of the room. He knew the kid was angry, judging by the high-pitched yelling behind him. It was a fairly clear night, making it easy for Shiranui to navigate the streets of Kyoto. The demon quickly made his way into the house the three demons were currently occupying. Shiranui was fortunate enough to make it back before the other two demons did. He quickly sat down as he heard Kazama's thumping on his way up the stairs. Amagiri followed behind with nearly inaudible footsteps.

"I can't believe those pesky humans showed up again! I was just beginning to enjoy my meal too," Kazama complained.

Shiranui rolled his eyes. He knew Kazama would have found something to complain about whether his meal was interrupted or not. He couldn't wait to one up the two of them with the information Heisuke had blabbed to him.

Not missing a beat, Amagiri quickly countered, "Their leader seems competent enough, as far as humans go."

Amagiri had come to be an expert at soothing his ward's savage matter how angry Kazama got, Amagiri always had a way of turning things around. Even if Shiranui didn't agree with his whole flower nonsense,



he was the only one of them to have actually succeeded in keeping a woman. It was rumored he had a wife back in Osaka, though Shiranui had never personally met her. Shiranui was thankful for these skills sometimes, because he sure as hell wasn't going to put up with Kazama forever.

"They'll never be a match for us, no matter how well established their plan of attack is. The sooner they learn that, the better."

Shiranui contemplated this for a moment. Surely they couldn't be talking about the Shinsengumi. He then remembered Heisuke saying something about a raid and stopped himself before he swore loudly. He kicked himself for not following them for once. He could have had a decent fight with Harada! He bit his tongue in frustration as the two came in the room. They both looked mildly annoyed.

"Oh, Shiranui, you've returned. No doubt your day was more productive than ours was," Amagiri mused.

Oh, that's right. He did get to mess with that kid, and stir up some trouble about those damned flowers. Shiranui decided not to say anything, wanting to wait for the right moment, and brushed off the comment with a wave.

"Nah, I got nothing done either. Sounds like you ran into those damn humans again. I'm surprised they didn't bother you about that chick you went to go 'court' the other day."

Kazama frowned at this comment. Clearly his efforts had fallen flat, but Shiranui kept his mouth shut. He was smart enough not to mess with Kazama when he was angry, let alone dig at an obvious failure. Despite how fun it would have been, Shiranui wanted to keep his body in one piece.

"I've heard nothing from Yukimura. Either she has rejected my advances, or the Shinsengumi have kept her from accepting them."

His shoulders sagged when he was finished. Shiranui knew his anger had mostly passed, though he was clearly still disappointed from not only a ruined meal, but a ruined courting attempt as well. Shiranui had an inkling of pity for the man before remembering he had brought it on himself.

Amagiri stepped in to smooth his feathers, "I am sure it is nothing intentional on her part. The Shinsengumi have regarded you coldly with your advances, I am sure that is all it is.

Shiranui pitied Amagiri to an extent. While he was ultimately stronger than most demons, including Kazama, he had been stuck with watching over the idiot demon lord to be. As long as Shiranui had known Amagiri, he had been stuck with the task of keeping said idiot from taking his anger out on whoever was within reach. He also seemed to be stuck with helping Kazama find someone decent to settle down with. Unfortunately for all of them, he had picked the last surviving Yukimura, and she was holed up with a bunch of humans. Shiranui thought they were both idiots, perfectly matched for one another. It wasn't Amagiri's fault he had chosen her though, so Shiranui decided to cut him a bit of a break, just this once.

"Yea I'm sure that's why, Amagiri. Why are you so hell-bent on getting her anyway, Kazama? It's not like you didn't have hordes of women after you back home," Shiranui said as he inwardly rolled his eyes.

Shiranui watched Kazama bristle at this comment, though he made no move to draw his sword. This was a good sign, but also a warning not to push him too much further.

"She is not only the link to restoring the Yukimura clan, she is also a pureblood demon worthy of someone my status. She is clearly the best choice, and far superior to any woman back home."

Hm, it seemed that he was actually defending her. This was a surprising twist, given that when they met, he had just viewed her as an object to be claimed. It was clear Kazama wasn't going to budge on this, and neither of them had realized what really happened with those flowers. Shiranui decided to switch topics before Kazama got angrier.

"How about we go and get some real food, since your last meal sucked so bad, apparently."

They both raised an eyebrow at him; Shiranui was not known for his generosity, after all. Kazama's frown deepened, but they said nothing more. Shiranui sighed inwardly, relieved they didn't press further. He couldn't wait until this flower nonsense blew up in Kazama and Amagiri's faces. It was just a waiting game now. Perhaps he'd let his companions know what he learned over dinner, but then again, maybe he wouldn't. It would be more fun to let them find out on their own, and Shiranui knew it was only a matter of time before the Shinsengumi came knocking at their door looking for Kazama's head. Then Shiranui could watch all hell break loose when Kazama and Amagiri found out their plan had been an utter failure. He simply couldn't wait for that day to come.

### 3. Chapter 3

A/N: Thank you everyone once again for the kind reviews and follows! It makes my editor and I very happy. Enjoy the new chapter!

Sen rushed away from the Shinsengumi's base. The demon princess had come alone to check on her friend, Chizuru, and instead had discovered a battlefield. The Shinsengumi had already moved ahead, and when Sen had stumbled across them, she realized that the demon girl wasn't with the captains anymore. Though she wanted to take her anger out on the human soldiers, time was precious. She knew she had to find Chizuru before the Imperial Army or, god forbid, he did. Kazama had been persistent in his advances in the past, and Sen worried his intentions were less than noble. As Sen walked quickly through the forest, navigating through the undergrowth, she thought back to the day she had left Chizuru in the care of the Shinsengumi.

Sen took Chizuru aside, after a less than friendly welcome from the horde of captains she called her friends. Sen believed they were good and honest men, and trusted that they would not hurt her unless she proved dangerous. She did, however, wish they weren't so insistent on taking over a visit she had intended for Chizuru alone. Thankfully, their chief had let her get a moment alone with the girl. Now that

they had a moment alone, Sen felt comfortable enough to ask Chizuru what she truly wanted. The other girl had expressed her wishes to stay with the Shinengumi, and one thing remained on Sen's mind, a detail that was of some concern to her. \_

"\_So, Chizuru-chan, why do you want to stay?" Sen pushed, curious to know why Chizuru had rejected her offer. "Is it for one of those handsome gentlemen perhaps?"\_

\_Sen giggled, intending it to be an innocent question. Chizuru had clearly not taken it as such. Sen saw her get flustered and defensive in response to\_ \_her gentle teasing.\_

"\_No, I want to stay because they are my friends. I'm not involved with any of them."\_

\_This puzzled Sen. She thought for sure that would have been her motivation to stay behind. This left Sen fishing for more answers than before. What compelled her friend to have such loyalty to the Shinsengumi? Sen had always assumed she felt more than friendship for one of them, but now she didn't know. For now, she decided to let it go. It was Chizuru's decision after all, no matter how disappointed Sen was, and her reason for staying would make itself clear eventually. Sen wanted the best for her friend, and certainly hoped Chizuru hadn't lumped her into the same overbearing category as Kazama. Sen had heard of his attempts to steal the girl away, and while her reasons were much more noble, Sen knew Chizuru had an undying loyalty to these men. Her commitment was an admirable trait, as well as her sense of independence, and this made it easy for Sen to take the rejection in stride. She knew Chizuru wanted to feel independent, and Sen wasn't about to take that from her. She left soon after that, knowing the Shinsengumi would protect her friend.\_

What a foolish thought \_that\_ was, Sen thought to herself bitterly. Though they had done all they could to protect Chizuru, war had finally come to Kyoto. The Shinsengumi's involvement was unavoidable and now it had put Chizuru directly in danger. Sen knew the kodachi Chizuru carried was mostly for show, as she could barely defend herself, let alone fight a trained soldier. Sen had come to take her to safety, but now she had to find the girl first. The Shinsengumi's forces had been scattered, and Sen hadn't been too worried until she had arrived at their previous headquarters. Sen had stumbled across one of their highest-ranking members dead outside, and immediately panicked. This was turning out to be a disaster. While deep in thought, Sen walked straight into someone. Sen took a step back, very confused and a little alarmed. She rubbed her forehead and looked up to find that she had run straight into Kazama's guard, Amagiri. Sen had only heard rumors about the demon, and he lived up to many of them. He remained calm and composed, despite being run into, though she noticed small lines of worry creasing his brow. She had also heard that he was like a shadow to the young demon lord. She immediately noticed Amagiri didn't have Kazama with him, and panicked. The events leading up to now had worn her nerves thin, and she was only further aggravated by his appearance. She had enough worries already, and now that Kazama was running rogue, her last thread of composure had snapped.

"Amagiri, where is Kazama? You were supposed to be watching him!"

Sen was furious, she knew Amagiri had been bound to protect Kazama and it infuriated her to see the demon on his own. Ever since the Yukimura clan had been decimated, it had been her family's duty to make sure the other demons were well protected. The Yukimuras had meant well, trying to cooperate with humans, but they had chosen to live near those who were less willing to accept their existence and it had ended tragically. Sen couldn't stand the thought of losing yet another of their kind. Amagiri's family had been protecting the Kazama clan for generations, and seeing him without his charge was very distressing for Sen. While it was unlikely, she was concerned that something had happened to him. Even the best of demons could not always win against humans with evil intentions. She saw Amagiri tense up before responding, his jaw tightening in rage.

"I do not know where he is, though I wish I did."

Sen was surprised. For how composed he had been rumored to be, she was shocked to see him bare his teeth at her. He was obviously more unsettled by his lord's disappearance than she had assumed. Before she could think further on this, he went on to explain the situation.

"He was separated from me during the current battle, and I am in the middle of searching for him."

His jaw remained clenched, though Sen noted that his voice had a hint of worry to it. Sen was reluctant to believe him, but there was little evidence to suggest Amagiri was lying. He looked just as stressed as she did; there was no doubt. This did little to soothe her nerves, however. Amagiri's one job in life was to follow and protect Kazama, and he was failing at it at the moment.

"It's your job to watch him, and now he's free to go do whatever he wants, including preying on Chizuru! I've heard enough from the Shinsengumi just what you and your 'lord' have been doing in your spare time, and I'm tired of it!"

Amagiri looked taken aback at her anger. Sen watched as his shock faded into annoyance quickly, his expression bordering on offended. His response came out so quietly she had to strain to hear him. Clearly the guard was restraining himself from shouting back, judging by his clenched fists and tense shoulders.

"With all due respect, Princess," he hissed, "what information do you have to base that assumption off of? The words of humans and rumors are always unkind to us."

This disrespect was certainly unexpected, but she chose to ignore the hint of contempt in Amagiri's voice. Their relationship was an odd one, but Sen was hardly surprised that he had become loyal to the annoying demon lord. His anger wasn't uncalled for, she had just been yelling at him after all, even if she knew shouting would only get them so far. Sen had been too worried about Chizuru to care about composure until now.

"Word has gotten around about Kazama's escapades, and judging by what Chizuru has told me about your kidnapping attempts, it leaves little room for argument about his character."

Sen watched as Amagiri deflated slightly. She knew of their attempts to kidnap Chizuru and it was about time that Sen made it clear she, their princess, did not approve of it. She did not want Kazama to sully his family's name further by acting like a selfish child. She did not expect Amagiri to waver, and was shocked at his sudden change in attitude as he responded.

"We have tried to fix the damages following that attempt. There was something we attempted a few weeks ago, a gentler approach if you will, and it ended poorly for us. I've been trying to convince him of another attempt, but no success so far."

Sen noticed Amagiri sounded very tired. It was obvious he was exhausted; the battle must have taken a heavy toll on him, though she wondered what warrior out there could match a demon. Sen bitterly assumed that trying to rein in the overzealous Kazama must be more tiring than she imagined, and that must be the cause of his fatigue. She was willing to consider that the two had indeed been separated now, and became curious about this 'gentler approach'.

"This attempt seems innocent enough," she speculated, "But what did you have him try?"

Amagiri stiffened at this, and Sen was hesitant to press for an answer. His reply was quick and clipped.

"It has been a troubling experience, and I would rather not speak of it."

This only made her more curious, but without Kimigiku she was not about to pick a fight with the larger demon. Sen had to leave her valued guard back in Kyoto in an attempt to track down the now rogue demon, was undoubtedly the most dangerous of the trio, given his lack of predictability and loyalty\*\*. \*\*This made him a liability, and Sen knew he had to be found and controlled once more. This did leave Sen in a bad position due to her lack of protection, and a thought occurred to her that Amagiri would make a fine substitute for the meantime. Now she just needed to convince him that serving as her temporary bodyguard would benefit him just as much as it would benefit Sen herself.

"So you have lost Kazama? That is troubling," Sen mused. "It is unlikely we will find the people we are looking for without help, so perhaps we could search for them together. Your chargedoes seem to be drawn to Chizuru after all."

She saw Amagiri's brows lift in surprise. She supposed this was a normal reaction to someone who was angry with him only moments before. A hastily proposed alliance was hardly something that usually followed such course Sen never was one to hold anger for long- especially if it didn't benefit her, but she could understand his confusion. The guard's brows knit together in frustration as he responded to her idea.

"You have given me very little reason to assist you so far. All you have done is berate the fact that Kazama and I were separated, so I find it hard to have any desire to help you find Yukimura."

His reply bordered on irate. She thought it was a more than reasonable request, but she had clearly upset him. Sen knew she had

to use the last trick up her sleeve to convince him to come with her.

"Amagiri, while I respect your right to be angry, I am still your princess, and you will do what I ask. For now, we must focus on finding and protecting our respective demons."

Sen did not like having to pull rank on her people, but in a case such as this it was necessary. Amagiri did not look happy, but he did not defy her order. His fists tightened in anger briefly, and then he gave up, giving her a small bow.

"As you wish, Sen-hime. I have been following a path further north, which I now believe may be Yukimura's."

Sen was pleased with this answer. She had respect for what Amagiri had done to protect Kazama but was glad to know that he was ultimately loyal to her above all else, even if it required some coercing. They both followed the path for a few minutes before they heard screaming up ahead. Sen's nerves quickly thinned again as she panicked, knowing that scream belonged to Chizuru. Amagiri quickly picked up on her fear, and led her quickly toward the sound. They heard more screaming, and when they reached the clearing, they were surprised by what they found. Soldiers lay dead on the ground, and Kazama was talking to Chizuru not far from where the bodies were. She looked shaken, and Kazama was much too close to her for Sen's comfort. He appeared triumphant, as if he enjoyed taking down these soldiers for fun. Sen quickly rushed to Chizuru's side, eager to get her away from his advances. She hugged her friend tightly, feeling a weight lift off her shoulders.

"Are you oka\*\*y, \*\*Chizuru-chan? I've been so worried about you since the fire broke out in Kyoto!"

Sen hugged the younger girl, so excited to have found her again. She felt Chizuru laugh, no doubt at her overenthusiastic response to finding her. Sen took in her appearance; she was covered in cuts and bruises. A particularly nasty bruise was beginning to spread across her cheek, the princess observed. Sen could even swear the edges of her hakama were singed. Thankfully she was safe, despite some minor damage, much to Sen's relief. Now she had to figure out if Kazama had done anything to Chizuru before Sen had arrived.

"I'm so glad I found you! What are you doing here?"

Chizuru seemed hesitant to answer; seemingly embarrassed over the situation. Sen gently nudged her, hoping for an answer. Chizuru blushed and then told Sen what was going on.

"I got separated from the Shinsengumi back at the battle. I tried to find them, but I got all turned around and found myself in the middle of an Imperial camp."

Sen started to freak out, terrible thoughts running through her mind as she interrupted the girl.

"How did you end up here? You could have been really hurt!"

Chizuru patted her shoulder in an attempt to calm her down, and while she appreciated the effort, Sen was hardly reassured. She had been

trying to reassure the girl, not the other way around!

"Don't worry Sen, I'm fine. Kazama came to save me before anything bad happened."

Sen was honestly shocked at her answer. While she knew Kazama wanted her for a prize, she had hardly expected him to act like a knight in shining armor. Perhaps he had better motives, but she was hesitant to accept this. While she tried to calm a shaken Chizuru, she overheard Amagiri and Kazama talking. Kazama sounded very irate.

"What were you doing, Amagiri? I thought you were following me, and then you weren't there."

She heard Amagiri take a deep breath before answering. Sen knew he had to deal with this on a regular basis, but also had a feeling the guard was nearing the end of his rope right now. Sen guessed he had been worried about the younger demon, and being berated for helping her wasn't exactly a warm welcome. She supposed Amagiri was rather used to it though.

"You were separated from me earlier, and I have been trying to find you ever since. Sen-hime was looking for Chizuru, so we decided to search together."

Sen felt Chizuru relax, and decided now was as good a time as ever to ask the younger girl to come with her to safety. She edged closer to her friend, putting herself between the girl and the two men.

"So Chizuru-chan, I would truly love it if you would come with me now. You will be out of danger, and it would calm my nerves greatly if I knew you were safe. I know you would love my home so much, and you wouldn't even have to make tea, unless you wanted to, but--"

She saw Chizuru laugh softly at her, and was confused. Sen realized why she was laughing and it alarmed the princess. Her friend had no desire to come home with her, Sen just couldn't understand why. She knew the girl cared for the Shinsengumi, but they had left her behind. Surely she didn't want to go after them? Sen's disappointment was quickly confirmed when Chizuru began to shake her head.

"I'm sorry Sen, but I need to go find my friends. They mean too much to me to just run away right now."

Sen sighed, knowing there was nothing she could say to deter her. Chizuru's smile never faded, and Sen had to reluctantly respect her undying loyalty. Even if she could not help the girl, Sen was going to make sure she was safe.

"So are you headed to Edo now? Please tell me you don't plan to go alone."

Sen knew it was a long shot, but pleaded with her friend nonetheless. She hoped Chizuru had a plan. She had very nearly gotten killed just now, and if Kazama hadn't arrived when he did, she most certainly would have been in serious trouble. Sen shuddered to think what would have quickly shook her head once more and smiled at her. Sen was confused until she saw the girl turn toward Kazama and address him timidly.

"Actually, I was hoping to ask you to come with me. I know you're headed to Edo, and was wondering if you wouldn't mind taking me with you?"

Sen felt her mouth drop open. Had she heard her right? She saw Amagiri out of the corner of her eye, caught in a rare moment of shock. Kazama was stunned, but snapped out of it quicker than either of them did. Sen heard him laugh quietly, a pleased smirk making its way onto his face.

"As long as you don't get in my way, I don't care what you do."

Sen started to panic, a million thoughts racing through her head. She wondered how Chizuru could be so foolish. She had walked straight into Kazama's trap after avoiding him for so long! Sen considered her lucky to still be on her own feet, as opposed to over the demon lord's shoulder right now. Sen quickly pulled Chizuru over; she needed to save her friend before she did something stupid.

"Are you sure about this? It is \_Kazama,\_ after all."

Sen was very worried, and she saw the girl give her a small smile as she took Sen's hands.

"It'll be fine, Sen. I trust him to get me there safely."

This is exactly what Sen was worried about. Chizuru was oblivious to the risk she was taking! Sen didn't trust Kazama as far as she could throw him. Chizuru may, for some reason, but it was her duty as the girl's friend to make sure she was truly safe in his companionship. Sen had to think quickly before they ran off to Edo. If she followed them, it was likely Kazama would put on an act for her. She needed someone else to do her dirty work, so she was free to spy on him. Sen looked over at Amagiri and found her solution.

"I must stay here, unfortunately. I have work here that still needs to be done. Amagiri, I would like to ask you to go with them."

Amagiri bowed at her, and Sen was very relieved that he was willing to continue following his lord. Of course he probably would have done so anyway, but now that Sen commanded him to he had a moral obligation to follow her wishes and to protect looked downright outraged at this though. It clearly hadn't occurred to him that Sen outranked him, and could make his bodyguard follow him indefinitely. She saw the demon lord scoff at the thought of needing someone to protect the girl, but said no more after some heated arguing with Amagiri. Sen wasn't shocked that he dropped the subject entirely; he has still gotten his way after all, now that Chizuru was following him willingly. Sen was relieved when they all went off without any fuss. After years of snooping around the palace herself, Sen felt confident that she could eavesdrop on the trio without being noticed. She wanted to see for herself that everything was fine, and she doubted they would notice her. Sen made sure to head back toward Kyoto at their goodbyes, and doubled back once they were far enough away.

They trekked through the forest late into the night. As it grew darker, it became more difficult to travel. Sen tripped repeatedly following them, and was almost discovered more than once by Amagiri



when she made too much noise. Kazama was too busy scouting ahead to help, and they moved on without acknowledging her presence. Sen followed the trio for several miles outside of Kyoto when they decided to rest for the night. Chizuru had stumbled once or twice out of weariness, and Kazama was obviously done with their "useless meandering" as he put it. They started a fire to fight against the cold wind that rustled through the leaves and settled down for the night.

She was surprised when Kazama took first watch, allowing his companions to sleep for a few hours. For how well he dressed, Sen was convinced he would put vanity over safety. She stood watch, out of sight, and observed the scene below her. Amagiri seemed hesitant to sleep, opting instead to grumble at Kazama once Chizuru fell asleep.

"Kazama, are we really taking her to Edo? Your motives seem hardly reasonable, following a bunch of humans to their deaths."

Kazama's brows knit together in anger, and he began to half whisper, half yell at his cohort.

"Yes, and I believe you were the one who was ordered to follow us, so don't start complaining to me."

Amagiri sighed, trying to avoid a pointless fight. They were both trying hard not to wake the girl, but she was too far asleep to care what either of them was doing. Chizuru must have been exhausted to fall asleep that quickly, Sen thought. Amagiri frowned, staring sullenly into the fire.

"Even so, why don't you just run off with her now? I doubt my presence would do much to deter you, and she is within reach."

Sen almost gave herself away to yell at Amagiri, though she quickly bit her tongue to stop herself. She had to trust that he was on her side, and perhaps he was simply poking at Kazama to get some of his own answers. She saw Kazama scowl at him, narrowing his eyes as he replied.

"She wishes to go to Edo, and I said I would take her. Besides, I wish to see those foolish humans through to what will no doubt be a swift end."

Amagiri seemed pacified by this, as was Sen. They both intended for the girl to make it there safely, and it was a relief to know Kazama would go through with his promise. Amagiri soon gave into sleep, staying near Chizuru. This pleased the demon princess immensely; it assured her that his priority was protecting her friend. Kazama sat by the fire in an attempt to warm himself, occasionally glancing around the forest, scanning for intruders. Sen remained on guard, ready to swoop in and save Chizuru from his advances, when she saw something entirely different happen.

Chizuru rolled over in her sleep, muttering to herself and teeth chattering, obviously uncomfortable. The demon lord's attention was drawn to her, but he seemed to hesitate. It seemed he was unsure of what to do. After a quick glance toward Amagiri, Sen watched as he took off his haori and draped it over her. She quickly snuggled up to it and fell into a deeper sleep. Sen watched him settle back into his

seat by the fire, arms wrapped around himself without complaint. She was honestly surprised he had done such a nice thing for the girl. While this had caught Sen off guard, his next move was even more shocking.

Kazama silently shifted closer to the girl, being careful not to wake her. He saw him gently push the hair out of her face, fingers tracing the curve of her cheek. He looked at the bruise on her face, a frown on his face. She had heard of how roughly Kazama had treated her during his kidnapping attempts from the Shinsengumi, and was stunned to see him treating Chizuru like a porcelain doll now. He seemed almost loving. Sen had hardly anticipated him to not only restrain himself, but to go out of his way to be nice? It was unexpected, to say the least, that he would act like he actually cared for the girl. It seemed as though he did have better intentions than Sen had thought.

Sen now felt somewhat guilty. Perhaps Amagiri was right, and his attempts to calm Kazama down had succeeded. She sighed, and decided to leave the rest to Amagiri. He had been proven more than capable up to this point, and she trusted him to ward off anything bad Kazama might decide to do now. She though she wondered if perhaps Chizuru was in good hands after all. She would continue to keep an eye on the young demon lord, but for now, she trusted them enough to leave. Sen headed back toward Kyoto, hoping for the best for her friend.

#### 4. Chapter 4

A/N: Thank you everyone for reading so far! This is the last official chapter before the epilogue. I hope you enjoy!

Kazama awoke, feeling confused and slightly cold. He looked around, and was thankful that Chizuru was still asleep. He quickly took his haori back, determined to keep his one good deed a secret from didn't want his companions to know he had tried to be nice, though judging by the amused look he received from Amagiri, it hadn't gone completely unnoticed. His guard knew better, and said nothing, allowing Kazama to retain some of his dignity. He saw the larger demon scan the forest before relaxing, sitting down to discuss the day ahead.

"We are a few hours outside of Edo. I have business to take care of while we are there, and it is better I do it alone."

Kazama watched his companion internally struggle with the fact that he would have to leave his ward alone. Kazama could hardly care less what Amagiri did, he hadn't been the one to make his guard follow after him after all. It was Sen's orders keeping him around, not his own, which irked Kazama to no end. Amagiri had been his guard first, and Sen had no right to pull rank on him. Kazama shifted into a more comfortable position, crossing his legs as he responded.

"Whatever it is, be quick about it, we must move back home soon before this war gets any worse. I trust Sen has stopped following us for you to say this though."

He saw Amagiri nod, and they both relaxed noticeably. Amagiri had been the first to notice Sen trailing them last night, but after more

than a few stumbles, Kazama had heard her as well. He figured the princess would follow them, but had assumed she would have been a bit more tactful about it. He swore the princess had fumbled and staggered more than Chizuru, who had almost passed out from exhaustion. It was a relief to both of them that she was not following them anymore. It meant they were free to do as they pleased, though Kazama still didn't think he needed a babysitter around Chizuru. He sighed, looking over at the sleeping girl.

"Well, we should wake her before too long. I will leave her at her house and come find you when you are done. I have my suspicions about her 'father' and I believe he has come home to use her in his studies."

Amagiri's face looked grim, and Kazama was sure his was no different. It had been kept secret from Chizuru that her father was not related to her by blood. The doctor had raised her well enough before this war broke out. She probably still loved him as her father, despite all of his shortcomings. They had both decided it was for the best she didn't know about her adoption. Unfortunately Kodo had quickly turned to the Imperial Army once it was clear they would give him power and the resources to continue making the furries. None of the demon clans approved of this research, which had resulted in Kodo's exile, but they both knew he had to be stopped quickly before he tried something crazy with his newfound army. Amagiri gave him a curt nod in agreement that they should start moving on. Kazama watched the man get up and nudge Chizuru awake, shaking her shoulder gently, informing her that they must leave. Kazama watched as she yawned, barely awake, before stumbling to her feet. They packed up camp quickly and headed on toward Edo.

Kazama led the way, keeping an eye on the girl while Amagiri followed behind. Chizuru, for some reason, felt comfortable enough to ramble to him. Kazama followed some of it, too concerned with what the doctor was doing behind their backs to pay attention to idle chatter, drifting in and out of listening for some time until she said something of interest to him.

"â€| though I suppose it's been a while since I saw all three of you together. Not since that silly flower incident about a month ago. Heisuke still laughs about it sometimes, I guess because everyone initially blamed him."

He stopped walking momentarily, snorting in anger, and quickly kept walking when he thought of how childish he must look. He frowned slightly at the word 'silly.' He hardly thought it was \_silly.\_ It seemed she had some idea what had happened. Kazama saw Chizuru stop when she looked at him, obviously oblivious to why he looked annoyed.

"â€| Is something wrong?"

Kazama sighed at her pathetic look of confusion. That whole plan of Amagiri's had been an utter failure, and now she had to bring it up after they had been avoiding the subject for months. His frown deepened, trying to think of a way to save his dignity, though it had already been damaged beyond repair thanks to those damn flowers. Kazama scowled, knowing he had to give Chizuru a response; otherwise she would just nudge it out of him eventually.

"You mentioned a flower incident. Continue on about that."

Chizuru looked confused at his sudden request, but she began telling him what she knew.

"It was about a month ago I guess, someone left some flowers outside of my door and didn't leave a note or anything saying who they were from."

Kazama scowled. He knew all of this already, and it didn't help to have to hear his mistake once more, especially from her. He turned away from her as he felt his cheeks heat up, avoiding her gaze. It had already been rubbed in his face enough. Chizuru looked away, just as embarrassed as he was. Kazama gave her a nudge to go on, clearing his throat. She stuttered, but went on anyway.

"Heisuke seemed convinced you did it, but I don't have any idea where he got that from. All you did before that was try to kidnap me so why would you start sending flowers? That's what everyone else said too. Do you know anything about that?"

He saw the apparent blush on her face as she looked to him for an answer. He grimaced, not wishing to answer the question, but knowing he could not avoid it for long. Kazama heard Amagiri snicker faintly behind him and knew he had no way around the issue.

"Yes I know what happened. I left those for you, and did not leave my name. Your friends mocked me extensively for it."

His response was clipped and irate, and his anger only got worse when he heard Chizuru giggle at him. He glared at her had been mocked enough by his own companions, as well as all of the Shinsengumi, and now she was mocking him as well! Kazama was about to start yelling when she calmly stopped him with a hand on his own, blushing deeply.

"They were very nice flowers. Thank you, Kazama."

He deflated at her kind words. His flirtations and forwardness had done nothing in the past; he never thought this plan would have ever worked! He had only done it to appease Amagiri, and it turned out the guard had been right. Kazama had never heard a response from her about those stupid flowers, and thought the whole thing had gone over poorly until Shiranui told him he forgot a note. He had sulked and assumed her friends had taken credit for it, never speaking about it again after that. Kazama hadn't asked the girl about the incident before, assuming that it had been a disaster, and was shocked to hear she had enjoyed them. He could hardly see the use in flowers; they lived for a few days at most, and then withered into were hardly a suitable symbol for undying love, or so Kazama thought. Perhaps it was just a thing females enjoyed. It was the only reasonable answer the demon lord could come up with. He could see no purpose in them. Kazama looked down at her, as she eagerly waited, hoping for him to say something in return.

"Yes well, I left them for you to enjoy, and they fulfilled their purpose."

He kept walking, eager to put this whole conversation behind them. He was ready to forget all the embarrassment he had suffered and revel

in the fact that she had liked them. He regretted that they would have to part ways as soon as they reached Edo, but he was content to enjoy her company now for the rest of the journey.

Kazama walked ahead of the girl, noticing she did not immediately follow. He was about to turn around when he heard her sprint ahead to catch up, joining him by his side. The large smile on her face said that she knew what he had truly meant, that he had more feelings for her than he was willing to let on. Kazama was no judge of women's thoughts, but he took her smile as a good sign that she felt the same. They finished their journey in a content silence, waving Amagiri off as he went to go conduct his own business. They had arrived too late to find the Shinsengumi, but Kazama had kept his promise and brought the girl safely to Edo. He saw no reason to follow her further into the city, and had his own business to attend to here that she did not need to be involved in.

He left her with one last promise to come back for her, and went to go stake out her house to wait for Kodo. He had told her he needed to find Amagiri before they left Edo, and had told Chizuru to stay put in the town square, hoping she would listen. Unfortunately, she hadn't and went to go look around her old house and they both ran straight into the deranged demon. His motives had been as Kazama expected; he intended to take his daughter and use her to restore the Yukimura family through the use of furies. Kazama's blood boiled at the hurt look in her eyes. No matter what Kodo was to him, Chizuru still saw him as the loving father he had used to be. Kazama watched the girl plead with him, begging him not to go through with his plans. When it was clear that her father would not listen to her, Kazama quickly intervened, intending to fight the doctor. Before he could dispatch the treacherous demon, Kodo moved aside in an attempt to run. The doctor had created enough a diversion to escape in the end, using his own daughter to distract the demon. Kazama grit his teeth in anger as he held the girl who sprawled against his chest. Kodo had thrown her aside in his haste, and she would have fallen to the floor had Kazama not stepped in to catch her. It was unforgivable to toss his own daughter around, and the pain of betrayal written on her face was enough for Kazama to mark Kodo for a death sentence.

Once Chizuru was steady enough to stand, they both rushed outside, only to discover he had fled. To Kazama's further annoyance, Amagiri had been waiting unnoticed outside, spying on the battle as well. He had seen Kodo, was even close enough to snap his neck, but had been unable to catch him. Kazama felt his grip tighten on his katana, but forced himself to relax when he saw how disheveled the girl looked after the confrontation. In an attempt to calm his temper, as well as his rattled nerves, Kazama found himself seeking Amagiri's advice. It was a blow to his pride to even consider asking for help, but he began to tell the guard what he had learned in hopes of creating a plan that did not put the girl in danger. This whole venture would be a waste if she were injured now. The two men sat down inside the house to discuss while Chizuru made tea for them. They could hear the china rattling in her trembling hands as she served them. Kazama watched her hesitate slightly, before asking about what all three of them had avoided until now.

"What do you plan to do when you find my father?"

Kazama saw the fear in her eyes, knowing she still had hope that Kodo

was a good man. Chizuru even still deluded herself into calling him 'father' after she had found out he had used her to gain power, and had no real relation to her at all. Even now she was still defending him, which only furthered his anger at the doctor. To Kazama, the solution was simple, Kodo had to die. He had less than honorable intentions, and had used his daughter as a shield for his own protection. In addition to creating an army of furies, he had also manipulated the last surviving female of the Yukimura clan under the false pretenses of fatherly love in order to control her. It was obvious that he could not be allowed to live any longer. What a fool that doctor is, Kazama thought bitterly, though fool was a kind way to put it. Regardless, the demon lord worried about breaking the news to the girl.

"He plans to use those false demons to create an army and take out anyone in his way, regardless of their race. He cannot be allowed to live."

Kazama regretted his bluntness for a moment when he saw Chizuru's eyes well up with tears. He could hardly blame her, she had been raised with human feelings her whole life, and from past experiences fighting for her he knew those were hard for Chizuru to toss away. She still remained friends with that useless bunch of samurai after all, and they had seemed loyal enough to her as well until recently. Even after learning she was a demon and had no need to stay with those men, she remained loyal to quickly shook these thoughts from his head, knowing he couldn't let the girl's tears stand in the way of a necessary move toward the greater good. He knew he had to act quickly to get her to stop though; he could hardly stand her crying.

"This is for the best, Yukimura. Kodo has decided to get too far involved in the endeavors of humans to satisfy his own greed. If he is allowed to continue, he will kill many innocent lives. Do you truly want that?"

He watched her sniffle, then shake her head. Good, he thought, she had some sense about her. Despite her lingering feelings for the doctor, he knew she could see this was ultimately the best course of action. He looked at Amagiri, who nodded in agreement. They would continue on toward Edo to find Kodo, and ultimately take him and his army of furies down. The three quickly agreed upon a plan; Kazama and Chizuru would lower Kodo's guard and wait until Amagiri had taken down the furies outside before coming back to assist his ward. Kazama had initially fought against bringing the girl into it, but she had held her ground, wishing to say her piece to the doctor. Kazama agreed, though reluctantly. He could hardly put up a fight after she had already agreed to help take Kodo down, though he was unhappy about putting her in deserved to be able to say goodbye, so Kazama had given in quickly. Once Chizuru had said what she wanted, Kazama had planned to have Amagiri take her away to spare her from having to see her father die. The plan went rather smoothly, until it came time for the demon lord to finish the man off. Amagiri had almost gotten the girl out of harm's way when suddenly she had struggled out of his grasp. Before his guard could grab her, Chizuru had gotten in between his katana and Kodo, and she had her arms raised in defense of the despicable man. Kazama felt his eyes go wide, knowing he had almost cut Chizuru down with his own sword.

"Please don't, Kazama! I'm the head of the Yukimura clan; I'm responsible for my father's misdoings. Punish me instead!"

Kazama saw the determination in her eyes, though he was still frozen in disbelief. The man on the floor looked just as shocked. He could hardly believe she had just offered to die for this man. The doctor had manipulated her and used her as a means for his own escape, and yet she still thought it was her burden to bear. Kazama quickly shook himself out of his shock and weakly chuckled at the girl. He knew that he would never let her take responsibility for the pathetic man, not even at her own insistence. He tried to move her aside, but she just struggled more.

"You can't do this Kazama! He's my father!"

Kazama's scowl softened at her words. He took her chin in his hand and gently tilted her head upward, looking her in the eyes as he spoke though his sword did not waver away from Kodo.

"I will not let you be a sacrifice for this man's mistakes. They are his responsibility alone."

His words left no room for argument, and before she could argue back, Kazama had moved himself between her and Kodo. Amagiri hung back, letting his ward fight his own battles. He heard her weak protests behind him, but they were mostly unheard over the sound of blood pounding in his ears. He hated the doctor, how he had used his own family just for power and betrayed his own kind. He hated how Chizuru cried for this fool, despite everything he had done. His grip on his katana tightened as he stalked across the room, knowing that he may ruin any good will the girl had toward him after dirtying his hands with her beloved father's blood. Kazama had already decided to protect her no matter what, and this had to be done not just for her, but also for the good of their whole race. He executed the doctor quickly, stabbing the blade into his heart, wanting simply for all of this to be over.

The tension in the room ebbed, but he soon heard sniffing behind him. Kazama turned around and saw the girl crying. She rubbed at her eyes in an attempt to hide her face from him. He was unsure of what to do to calm her, looking at Amagiri who gave him no support other than a wave of the hand toward the grieving girl. He flushed at his guard in annoyance; how was he supposed to know what that meant? Kazama slowly inched toward the girl, and wrapped an arm around her, patting her head with his other hand. It was all he could really do to soothe her to the extent of his knowledge, and after a while the demon felt her relax in his arms. Her sobbing slowed and she burrowed slightly against his chest. Kazama felt at peace having the girl there in his arms, and was content to let her stay as long as she pleased. He saw Amagiri smile out of the corner of his eye, before leaving the room and giving them space. Kazama felt the girl shift in his arms as she looked up at him, seeming hesitant to talk.

"Go on," he encouraged her.

"Kazama, can we at least leave him somewhere he can be found before we leave? I want him to at least have a proper burial somehow."

Kazama nodded, all his will to fight against her gone. If this is what she wanted, it was the least he could do to soothe her grief. He

felt her relax, clearly comforted by this. The two made sure Kodo was in a place well travelled by humans where he was certain to be discovered and at least allowed to be put to rest, and went off to rejoin was more than he deserved, Kazama thought, but if this simple matter made Chizuru happy then he was willing to overlook it was clear that Amagiri had taken care of all his duties to Sen, he had rejoined Kazama as his guard, letting the other two decide what their next step would be. Kazama allowed Chizuru to express her wishes, knowing what her next request would be. He had already decided to follow her until they saw the end of the Shinsengumi, and quickly agreed.

The trio followed the path of dead soldiers and rumors of the Shinsengumi's demise north to Ezo, where they found a ruined town. Before he could stop the girl, Kazama saw her run for a bloodied and burnt flag, the last remaining symbol of the Shinsengumi. Kazama had anticipated this journey ending poorly, and did his best to console the grieving girl as she knelt on the ground, crying over the flag. It was clear none of her friends would be coming to greet her; they were all long gone. She had remained strong until now; he supposed knowing the Shinsengumi were truly gone had finally caused her to snap.

Kazama waited patiently until she composed herself once more to say anything. While before he would have no hesitation in pushing the girl around, he had grown to respect her now. She was stronger than he had thought, and had held her own against not only the Shinsengumi, but also Kazama himself. She had once been just a target for mating, but now Kazama saw her as more, as a companion he could easily spend the rest of his days with. When Chizuru finally calmed down enough, he approached her with his own plans.

"I will be returning to solitude now, Yukimura. It is not our place to get involved in human affairs anymore."

Kazama knew this was for the best. He had owed the Satsuma and Choshu after saving his family during the war that killed the Yukimura clan, and that debt had been repaid. Too many of their kind had been killed in this war, and it had been decided that the demons would stay out of human affairs for good now. The people of Japan would decide their own fate, and learn to pick up the pieces and move on just as the demon clans had done for centuries. Kazama's attention turned toward Chizuru, his eyes softening as he looked at her.

"When you are done here, come find me, or I shall find you."

Before she could react, Kazama gave her a parting to push her too far, he kept it chaste, giving her the softest kiss he could, barely brushing his lips against hers. He felt her slowly relax against him, and smiled against her lips. It was his way of promising that he would indeed return for her some day, though he had a feeling that she may come to him. Kazama shakily let her go before he lost control of himself, and bade her farewell. The demon lord had to take care of things back home, and she needed time to grieve over her lost friends. Kazama motioned toward Amagiri, who had stayed back to give them space, both of them intending to go home and stay there had faith in her now that she could hold her own, and trusted her to make the right decision when the time came for them to be reunited.



Amagiri matched his pace as they slowly walked back home. Kazama gave one last look back to the temple he had left her at before departing the thought back to the kiss, slowly laughing to himself. He ignored the look he received from his companion as he thought back to how this had all started. If it weren't for Amagiri's suggestion for the flowers, he wouldn't have gotten anywhere with the girl. Kazama would never tell Amagiri this, but he was thankful for that stupid plan. Someday, he thought, he might tell his guard, but for now he decided to focus on his plans for his future with Chizuru.

## 5. Chapter 5

A/N: To all those who have followed this story, and me, thank you so much for your support. Life has been busy as of late, but I am glad to be able to finish this for all the people who have supported me in this venture back into fanfiction. This is the final chapter, of this story, but I plan to write more, so keep an eye out for some new stories in the future!

Chizuru giggled as she watched her husband get tackled for the fourth time that afternoon. It seemed their children really did love playing with him. Kazama always managed to retain his composure and dignity as they ran themselves into his legs, successfully knocking him over more often than not. She watched over them from the porch, feeling a mixture of love and pride for her family. Kazama, though he put on an act of mock annoyance whenever they mauled him, seemed just as happy with their family as she did. It seemed like ages ago, almost five years, that he had expressed his feelings to her, and now they were very happily married and settled down with an ever-growing family. To think this whole thing had started with that silly flower incident was something she remembered fondly.

Early in the morning, she had heard shuffling outside of her door, but thought nothing of it as she went back to sleep. The whole temple was patrolled regularly and she had assumed it was one of the soldiers doing his rounds. It was about an hour later that she heard shouting, which startled her awake. Chizuru quickly got dressed and went to go investigate, and saw three of the captains outside roughhousing. It wasn't unheard of that the trio of men would come home still drunk from the night before, but they all looked fairly sober, so she ruled that out. Nagakura and Harada seemed to be teasing Heisuke over something. Nagakura was currently fending off the youngest of the three, who seemed to be trying to wrestle with the larger man unsuccessfully. She saw Harada wink at her when he noticed her presence, staying out of the middle of the one sided fight. She wondered what was going on; it seemed far too early in the morning for any sort of activity, though she noticed the compound was all awake and moving about earlier than usual. She looked around and spotted flowers lying on the ground and quickly picked them up. It was a pretty bouquet of blossoms, and she would hate for them to get trampled on. She watched Heisuke struggle out of Nagakura's headlock with some difficulty and quickly run over to her. He tried to catch his breath as the other two laughed. She wondered to herself what was going on.\_

"Oi, Chizuru, do you know who those flowers are from?"\_

She looked at the flowers in confusion and then back at him. Heisuke looked annoyed about the current situation, but she saw the expression

quickly fade when he realized she was just as baffled as he was. Heisuke groaned and rubbed his neck, looking exasperated, before turning back to glare at the other two captains.\_

"\_Nagakura and Harada thought I left them for you," he said, grumbling.\_

"\_The flowers?" Chizuru wondered.\_

\_She thought they were pretty flowers, but didn't understand why the older captains would have thought he was responsible. He was undoubtedly the nicest one of the three, but just leaving flowers and running didn't seem his style. Chizuru looked at her friend, who was currently blushing furiously, stammering for an excuse.\_

"\_I've been training all day and yesterday! I didn't have time to do this! I mean, not that I wouldn't give them to you, but-"\_

\_Chizuru watched the others continue to pester him as he got more flustered, mindlessly playing with the flowers in her hands. Heisuke kept trying to defend himself against the others, but to no avail. Nagakura and Harada continued to horse around, mercilessly teasing him. She sniffed the flowers and enjoyed how good they smelled. They were very pretty indeed. She had only seen these outside of Kyoto, and knew whoever got them had to go to some trouble, considering it was only barely spring. She had to wonder who would have done this, and thought to herself that surely whoever it was left a note. She looked around for some indication or note and found nothing in the flowers or on the floor. She wondered if it had just been kicked aside by the trio at some point. When she looked up from the floor, she jumped. Okita was staring down at her, leaning in very close to her, inspecting the flowers with a smirk that seemed permanently glued to his face. He moved back slightly, before crossing his arms and chuckling.\_

"\_So you really don't know who these are from? You really are useless, Yukimura. We should have killed you when we had the chance."\_

\_He shifted slightly, grinning at her before touching the sword lightly at his side.\_

"\_Of course we still couldâ€¦|"\_

\_She backed up slightly, unsure of what Okita was planning. Even though he was always threatening her with these jokes of his, she didn't really think he would hurt her, would he? Before she could think of what to do, she heard Heisuke shout in protest. The constant stream of jokes and mocking from his friends quickly muffled his cries. She fumbled to try and defend herself, reaching for her kodachi as Okita's smirk got knew drawing a sword against Okita was pointless, but she had to do something. It almost felt as though she was staring up at a hungry predator. Finally she was able to pull herself together enough to form an answer to his previous question without stuttering.\_

"\_No I don't know who left them. They were just here when I woke up."\_

\_Okita frowned, but said nothing more. He seemed to accept this as

enough of an answer for the time being. She watched as he went through the list of captains on his fingers, slowly counting them out as the suspect.\_

\_"Hijikata would have left some stupid haiku or something, so he couldn't have done it. Saito and I were busy teaching and training all day, so I would have seen him leave to do it. These three have no clue either it seems. Looks like you've got a secret admirer somewhere in the temple."\_

\_She felt her cheeks heat up at his teasing. Thankfully Nagakura stepped in to save her from getting even more flustered.\_

"\_Yeah but none of the soldiers even know she's a girl. That means someone had to have snuck in last night. We would have seen them for sure."\_

\_Chizuru saw Nagakura's brows knit together as he tried to work out what was going on. She almost snickered at his face; it was one he hardly ever made about trivial things like a bunch of flowers. Chizuru didn't think it suited him well. Heisuke stepped in and quickly took over, a large grin on his face as he finally saw his opportunity to tease his friend back.\_

"\_Well if you were on duty last night, anyone could have snuck in!"\_

\_Nagakura's face turned red in a combination of anger and embarrassment at this. She watched as Heisuke sprinted away, Nagakura chasing after him. She felt someone pat her shoulder and looked up at Okita, who for once was genuinely smiling.\_

"\_Don't worry Yukimura, we'll figure this out. We can't just let anyone sneak around the place as they wish after all."\_

Chizuru laughed softly to herself at the memory. She realized later that Kazama had been too nervous to think of leaving a note, though she'd never tell him that she had found it surprisingly cute. The captains had teased Heisuke for days, convinced he had done it. She went back to watching the scene in the garden with amusement. Kazama had gotten out from under their children and was now chasing them away from the freshly cleaned clothing. It didn't matter much to her if she had to do the chore again, but she admired the effort he was making to save her some work. With four kids that alone was a full time job.

Later she had learned about another battle, where the captains had discovered that Kazama was the one behind the flowers. Of course it had taken her quite a few weeks more to find out herself who the real 'flower culprit' happened to be. They had met the demons again at the temple, and she had been distracted with Amagiri. He seemed disinterested in the whole battle, both with the fighting and kidnapping attempts, but successfully kept her from getting involved in anything. The Shinsegumi had fought with the other two demons, intending to kick them all out of the temple, before Heisuke opened his mouth to start mocking Kazama. Apparently the captains had teased the demon mercilessly throughout the fight, calling him incapable of kindness and other awful things. She had always wondered why Kazama had quickly ended the fight, retreating without even trying to kidnap her. Now she knew why; he had been too ashamed to face her after the

mass mocking. Chizuru had tried to get more out of Kazama about the incident months later, but he seemed too ashamed of the whole incident to say any more about it.

She watched as Kazama put the kids down for a nap. Their youngest child had fallen asleep nestled in his arms as he took them inside. Chizuru could hear rustling and sleepy protests from her other children but quickly enough the house fell into silence. She could hear the soft padding of her husband's feet as he returned from his a sigh of relief Kazama sat down beside her. She leaned into him, content to enjoy his company. He had taken a while to get used to her gestures of affection; after all she had rejected his own for months before she had accepted them. Now he seemed pleased every time she was near him. Chizuru was very happy when she felt an arm snake around her shoulders, pulling her closer. The seasons were starting to get colder, and soon they wouldn't be able to sit outside anymore. She would miss these moments outside where she could look over her gardens with her husband during the cold winter. She held his other hand as she softly spoke.

"Do you know what I was just thinking about, dear?"

"Hm?"

Kazama seemed more intent on gently but insistently pulling her into his lap. Even after all of these years he still acted like he had when they first met, stealing kisses and surprising her. She was no match for his strength, so she always gave in after more than a few hints and nudges. She never truly wanted to resist, but it was always a little fun to play hard to get with him. Chizuru let herself be pulled into his lap, content to enjoy the warmth radiating from his body as he held her close.

"I was thinking about when you left that bouquet for me!"

He began to grumble. Kazama hated when anyone brought the incident up. She could feel his arms tense up around her and his mouth turn downward in a deep scowl. She gently elbowed him in the side, trying to distract him from his anger.

"Kazama, I'm glad you left those flowers, even if it took a while to find out they were from you."

She felt him shift uncomfortably underneath her before glancing down with a puzzled expression. Clearly this wasn't what he had been expecting from her.

"Really? Why would you say that?"

Chizuru giggled as she wrapped her arms around him in a hug and let her head rest on his shoulder. Kazama was still a bit clueless after all this time about the finer points of romance, especially without Amagiri around. She missed the older demon at times. As soon as they had gotten married, he had left on a long journey with his family, far away from his ward. Chizuru had thought this odd at first, but she had realized that the man had probably been watching over Kazama his entire life and deserved a break. She was pleased he had taken off to go be happy himself. The older demon had faithfully watched over Kazama, and she had to respect how loyal he was to the demon lord. She knew Amagiri would come back eventually, as he had once

explained to her that his family has served the Kazamas for generations. Once his son was of age, it would be his responsibility to look after their eldest daughter, the next heir of the clan. Chizuru giggled at the thought; her daughter acted just like her father most of the time, and would undoubtedly be just as much trouble. She hoped his son would be just as helpful as Amagiri had always been, especially with romantic gestures. She knew that the whole flower thing had to be one of Amagiri's ideas, as Kazama acted like it was the silliest thing he had ever done. Still, she wouldn't have her husband any other way. She squeezed his hand as she answered him, reassuring him gently.

"Because without those flowers, I never would have known you liked me. And I certainly wouldn't be happily married to you either."

She saw his face turn slightly pink at this. Chizuru loved when she could make him blush. It rarely happened so she loved those moments when she saw it; so often it was the other way around. She giggled and reached up to him, giving him a small kiss on his cheek. Chizuru snuggled up to him as a particularly cold breeze cut through the house, trying to leech some warmth from him as he wrapped both arms around her. Moments like these were the reason she was happy she was his wife, though his forwardness had intimidated her at first. She had never imagined her life would turn out the way it had after she started her journey to look for her father. How Kazama had managed to find her she didn't know, but she was endlessly grateful that he had. Now the Shinsengumi and the shogun were gone, but she remembered her friends fondly. She treasured that time of her life, though it pained her to think about it for very long. Being here with her family and Kazama was infinitely more precious in the losing her friends and family, she never thought she would find happiness again. As she fell asleep settled in her husband's arms, she knew she would never be without it as long as he was by her side.

End  
file.